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SUBJECT: NEW HELMAND GOVERNOR: SAYING THE RIGHT THINGS

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Neumann for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Assadulla Wafa was appointed as the new Governor of Helmand Province on December 16. He is currently in Kabul but plans to move to Lashkah Gar in the next few days. Wafa was most recently Advisor, Minister, and Prime Assistant to the Minister of Frontiers and Tribal Affairs and has served as Governor in both Konar and Paktia provinces.

12. (C) During a December 11 meeting with Ambassador Neumann, Wafa touched on the range of problems that would face him in Helmand but seemed confident and ready to take on the challenge. Wafa acknowledged that Helmand "was full of problems". He said all the right things on security, Musa Qala, relations with tribes, and his plans for Helmand. The Ambassador assured Wafa that the U.S. would provide him with whatever support we could, as would the UK. The Ambassador pressed Wafa to work closely with the UK and Wafa agreed.
END SUMMARY

Kajaki Dam

13. (C) Ambassador Neumann briefed Wafa on the Kajaki dam project and the discussions held the previous day at the UK PRT. The Ambassador conveyed his decision to go ahead with the USAID-funded project and asked for Wafa's support in placing this as a top priority in his administration. He said Wafa's help would be needed in obtaining both local community/tribal support as well as support from neighboring Sangin District, particularly on security. The Ambassador promised to provide a USAID briefing to Wafa. Wafa welcomed the opportunity and pledged his full support for the project.

Tackling Security in Helmand

14. (C) Wafa agreed security was the top priority and was well aware of the security problems in the area -- "I'm from Kandahar, I know these people". He said the Taliban were not the only security concerns, as smugglers and drug traffickers were there colluding with the Taliban. He described Helmand

as being full of "big fish" who lived openly, even meeting with GOA officials. These people need to be arrested, he said. Wafa pointed to Baram Cha, in far south Helmand on the Pakistani border, which is a hub of trafficking and full of Taliban networks and suggested we get serious about taking on this area. The Ambassador said the UK would likely support cleaning up Baram Cha but may not want to stay. Wafa agreed to be supportive. Wafa explained that only 2-3 districts in Helmand had GOA-appointed district governors. Most were militia or Taliban affiliated, but could not be removed by force. What needed to be done, Wafa suggested, is getting the support of the tribes, as was done in Kunar. Only then should the Taliban be confronted, he said. Wafa was well informed on the tribal struggles involving former governor Sher Mohammed. Wafa said Sher Mohammed had "lost 90 percent of his support" but conceded that President Karzai was still among the ten percent.

Opposed to Musa Qala

15. (C) Wafa has been opposed to Musa Qala from the beginning and shared concerns that the area will become a Taliban sanctuary. He said he prefers using the tribes to provide security while having GOA authority present. The Ambassador explained that the Musa Qala agreement in itself covered only a small area but set a bad precedent. He conveyed UK concerns that if fighting started up again, the UK would need new resources they do not currently have. The Ambassador stressed the need to test the agreement with outside forces.

16. (C) Wafa noted that other areas were trying to replicate the agreement, such as Naw Zad, a northern district that saw

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a lot of fighting over the summer. He advised Naw Zad district leaders to present to Karzai their interest in central government authority, permitting all ANSF/ISAF into the district, appointing the District Governor from the GOA, and not allowing the ANP to be affiliated with any militia or a commander. Wafa said he did not see the potential spread of Musa Qala-style agreements, but if such proposals arose he would oppose them. When he gets to Helmand, he plans to request ISAF and the U.S. to help with security so that all the districts can be opened.

Strategy for Peace

17. (C) Wafa said his solutions to Helmand's problems would focus on less fighting, squandering fewer resources, gaining support from the tribes, and getting rid of corrupt officials. He wants the province to be an area of peace, with U.S. support. "As God is my witness, I will work to respect the dignity of all Afghans, as well as the U.S.", he declared. Wafa praised Karzai for keeping the calm in Afghanistan. The Ambassador encouraged Wafa to develop a close working relationship with the UK and to help them understand the tribes. Ambassador Neumann explained that in the UK press, there was no Afghanistan, only Helmand. He assured Wafa that the US would continue to help as we shared common goals. Wafa said he wanted to work closely with the British. He asked that we help him set up a meeting with UK Ambassador Evans, which subsequently occurred. Evans said later that he found Wafa reasonable, with sound opinions.

Comment

18. (C) Ambassador's Comment: I knew Wafa when he was Governor in Konar and have seen him since. His problem in Konar was that he was not sufficiently active in getting out of his office and was sometimes short tempered. Helmand has a different set of issues. Wafa has the background and knowledge to do well, the age to engender respect, and enjoys Karzai's confidence. Also, Wafa is a long-time GOA

administrator and this may help him. Wafa's answers to my questions were honest and direct, showing some difference from Karzai's views of the situation (and Wafa knew what he was saying). My feeling is tht Wafa may do well, but that the situation in Helmand is so complex and so quintessentially "Afghan" that no foreigner can predict how this appointment will work; President Karzai might even know what he's doing.

NEUMANN